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## Getting There is Half the Fun: Travel and Female Pleasure in English Erotica

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN travel and sexual pleasure is part of the popular imagination, involving such ideas as the 'woman on the train,' the 'mile-high club,' and 'sex tourism'; however many, if not most, of these concepts prioritize masculine pleasure. The traveller is usually conceived of as male, and his pleasure is the objective of the sexual journeying. Travelling itself—the geographic movement of individuals—is usually conceived of as masculine in nature. The most obvious example of this is the vocabulary of penetration and domination used to describe encounters with foreign lands and foreign (female) bodies.

Female travel, along with female pleasure, is popularly imagined in more qualified terms. There are the many physical restrictions placed on female travellers even today (usually reinforced by the threat of sexual violation); additionally, the vocabulary of female movement is often sexualized negatively: streetwalkers, 'fast' or 'loose' women, the girl who 'gets around.' And yet while women's travel is often conflated with rape, prostitution, or promiscuity, there simultaneously exists a sense that travel presents women with opportunities for sexual pleasure that could not be accessed in the domestic context—much as travel does for men. But for women, this pleasure must be negotiated around the more negative visions of female sexual travel, as well as around standard constructions of gender that equate masculinity with activity and movement, and femininity with passivity and stasis. This means that both male and female writers tend to present female travel in a different way than they do male travel.

This paper will consider some of the ways in which authors of erotic literature in English use travel as a means of envisioning

sexual gratification for women. I am particularly interested in exploring the *scope* of sexualized representations of female travel, from early erotic texts in English written by men, to contemporary erotica written by women.<sup>1</sup> While the history of English erotica that takes on the task of representing women's pleasure is fairly meagre (*Fanny Hill* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* dominate the tradition in this respect), contemporary erotica is effusive on the subject, especially now that 'women's erotica' has become a publishing phenomenon. With new material being published every week, I cannot make any pretence towards presenting an analysis of women's travel in contemporary erotica that engages every variant of the topic. But many contemporary writers are responding to the earlier texts (often implicitly), and I have undertaken in this paper to trace the points of connection between different generations of writers who employ travel as a motif in texts that represent female pleasure.

In selecting the texts for analysis, I've used two overlapping methodologies: historical overview and thematic analysis. The genre of pornographic or erotic literature is relatively new. What we find in earlier traditions are not porno-erotic texts per se; rather, they are conceptual antecedents for what will later become a significant tradition. These early texts are important to a thematic analysis of contemporary erotica, however, as they demonstrate certain cultural underpinnings regarding women and travel that are assumed by later authors. This essay will begin by establishing some of those cultural underpinnings through an analysis of medieval English texts.

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<sup>1</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the definition of 'erotic' or 'pornographic'—and the distinctions between terms—is highly problematic ("Sex and Text: Teaching Porno-Erotic Literature to Undergraduates," *The Dalhousie Review* 83 [2003]:189–214). Since this paper employs these words in reference to a specific genre of literature, the definition can be made somewhat more clear: erotic/pornographic literature is literature that deals with sex in a graphic manner, and is usually written to arouse. The genre is clearer when applied to contemporary texts, especially those marketed by publishers under the rubric 'erotica.' With older texts, the definition becomes more subjective, but there are certain texts that are commonly designated 'erotic,' if not 'erotica' in the contemporary commercial sense by the reading public.

Alongside the historical dichotomy (early erotic texts versus modern erotica) runs a gender dichotomy. Early erotic texts—not just from the medieval era, but right up to the mid-twentieth century—are almost all apparently written by men. Female authorship, pioneered by Anaïs Nin, takes over almost entirely in the latter part of the twentieth century. The thematic shifts that have taken place as women have become more empowered (and men more reticent) about representing female sexual perspectives in literature would make an interesting study in their own right. For the purposes of this paper, however, I have simply examined two canonical, male-authored erotic texts, to show that contemporary female authors are playing off of male-authored ideas about women and travel, at the same time as they are playing off of historical ideas about women and travel.

The two canonical, male-authored erotic texts I've chosen are John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. I find these books interesting, in the context of this essay, because they depict female travel in a metaphorical and geographically limited sense. It seems the male authors are aware of the erotic potential of female travel, but are ultimately loath to let their women wander very far. The sexual adventures of Fanny and Connie are in fact predicated on their heretofore chaste domesticity. As such, these books provide a counterpoint to the less restrained accounts of female travel that we find in contemporary erotica.

In the selection of contemporary texts, I've focussed on works that participate in the growing tradition of 'erotic literature,' eschewing material that might be said to talk *about* sexuality in a less explicit way, as well as texts that contain important erotic moments, but are not erotica in and of themselves. I do this purely for the sake of expediency, since the volume of material that might be designated erotic is massive, and growing.

Finally, this paper focuses on fiction written in English. To a certain extent this implies a cultural tradition focussing on England and the female traveller at home and abroad. But as the English language was exported, so too was the English erotic tradition, and later texts come from international writers, especially American writers. It is interesting to see how national identities interact with sexual and linguistic identities in some of these texts. In truth, the erotic canon has always been an international one—English-speaking readers frequently mention authors like the Marquis de Sade

and Pauline Réage in the same breath as Cleland and Lawrence when discussing erotic literature. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a huge market for French pornography in England, read both in translation and in the original French. Recently, American publishers have edged out British publishers in the erotic market. The cosmopolitan nature of the genre is perhaps best exemplified by Nin, a French woman of Spanish descent who wrote in English, and eventually moved to the United States. Nin herself seems sharply aware of the erotic potential of such trans-national identities, and she imbued her erotic fiction with a cosmopolitan energy that paralleled her own biography. While I have restricted my own study to texts originally written in English, the cultural identities discussed in this essay are more variegated—appropriate, I hope, to a paper focussed on travel.

Altogether, this paper casts a wide net, using examples from a broad range of historical traditions in order to sketch out some ideas about a genre—erotic literature—which is essentially still in its infancy, but which has roots extending back through English literature. These roots are worth considering in terms of the ways in which travel and female pleasure are connected in text.

*Lose Yourself: Space, Subject, and Sex*

The most basic association between travel and eroticism comes in the very concept of orgasm: the word 'ecstasy' encapsulates the idea of erotic pleasure, identity, and movement in its etymology (*ekstasis*, standing outside oneself, from *ek*, 'out' and *histemi*, 'to place'). John Donne says it best, perhaps; "Our souls," he says in "The Ecstasy," "were gone out," leaving the lovers' bodies, to enter a mystical realm where two individual identities could be melded perfectly.<sup>2</sup> Donne's vision of ecstasy involves a paradox that provides a baseline for understanding our associations of eroticism with travel. To find "pure" pleasure, one must slough off the restrictions of one's social and public identity—figured in this poem as the body. Freed from the restrictions of the body and society, one becomes "far purer," in that one can then combine with another soul in perfect union, to make "both one." This idea of sexual fulfilment is essentially a displacement of one's self—a disassociative

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<sup>2</sup> *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971) 54.

psychology which suspends the distinction between self and other, and which ultimately produces a true ("pure") erotic subject who is capable of achieving sexual pleasure.

Geographic travel in erotica parallels the paradoxical movement between individual and combined identities found in the concept of ecstasy. Individuals, especially women, must travel out of the social contexts that restrict their erotic identities in order to become more purely themselves. Once the travelling woman is anonymous, she is able to merge with others sexually, and in doing so she finds ecstasy. The process involves becoming singular, out of an oppressive collective identity, and then merging this new, purer self with other pure selves in erotic fulfilment. Although this paper will focus on literal travel in erotic literature, it is worth recognizing that a more figurative understanding of travel is frequently evoked in this tradition. Even in texts that do not employ the motif of literal travel, ecstasy and orgasms are frequently metaphorically constructed as journeys, voyages or, in the breathless words of *Fanny Hill*, "transports."<sup>3</sup> In representations of female eroticism, in particular, the idea of psychological displacement parallels the idea of physical displacement. Authors often explore the tension between the risks incurred by a woman who 'loses herself' on a social level, through travel, and the gratification obtained by a woman who 'finds herself,' on a psycho-sexual level, through travel.

### *Streetwalkers: Women Who Roam*

When considering the concepts of travel and female sexual pleasure in literature, we must also consider the ways in which the concept of female travel has been encoded historically in the English tradition. In medieval Europe the language used to discuss women who walk reflects the idea that women's sexual identity is a component of male identity, and that a woman's sexual integrity is at stake when she ventures out alone. As Ruth Mazo Karras explains in her book on medieval prostitution, prostitutes in medieval France were called "public women," a term that "evokes the way women's independence and their movement outside the control of the head of household became sexualized; 'common woman'

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<sup>3</sup> John Cleland, *Fanny Hill, or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Wagner (London: Penguin, 1985).

in England expressed the same idea of the woman who moved into the communal realm, becoming sexually available.”<sup>4</sup>

Medieval women were expected to carry their domestic context into the public realm, so they never really left home. The qualifications of female movement—veils, curfews, and chaperones—signalled a larger domestic context of male authority: households headed by husbands, fathers, and masters. A woman’s travel in this case becomes merely the display of her connection with a particular family or household. By extension, this familial context determines her connection to the broader community. The conduct poem “How the Goodwife Taught Her Daughter” (probably written by a clergyman) counsels young women to constrain their physical movements when in public: “And when thou goes in the way, go thou not too fast, / Brandish not with thine head, thy shoulders thou not caste [wiggle].”<sup>5</sup> If a woman must go out, suggests the poem, she must not draw attention to herself or her movements.

In the medieval and early modern European context, a woman walking alone is a sexual threat—her community context is lost and her individual mobility signifies her breaking away from the household identity that she should always carry with her. If she isn’t walking with someone, the community can’t tell ‘who’ she is (whose daughter, whose wife). This jeopardizes the status of the male head of the household she represents. The urban guild culture—economically, politically and socially structured as a network of male-run households and businesses—seems to have been especially conscious of the disruptive potential of women walking out alone, even for the most innocent of reasons. In at least one case, a man was fined for forcing his maid to be on the streets alone, “to the dishonour of all the fellowship.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the conduct books and some of the guild histories construct the idea of honour more broadly in terms of behaviour, sexual integrity—the guarding of a woman’s body for one man or

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<sup>4</sup> *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 138.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, “How the Good Wif Taughte Hir Dougtir,” *The Babees Book*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS os 32 (1868; New York: Greenwood, 1969) 39. I have standardized the text in this citation.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Reddaway, *The Early History of the Goldsmith’s Company 1327–1509* (London: Arnold, 1975) 151.

family, and (secondarily) for herself—is clearly what is at stake. The conflation of sexuality with movement is explicit, as Hanawalt notes, in metaphors of virginity, which “was described in terms of a space with walls and physical boundaries.”<sup>7</sup> Women who walked out were under the threat of rape: this was commonly understood. “Any woman walking the streets at night,” Karras notes, “was presumed to be available for sex.”<sup>8</sup> But the street was not the only public space that compromised a woman’s honour. Other public places that people moved in and out of—transient spaces like taverns, brothels and inns—marked the women in them as sexually transient. Vagabondage and travel from space to space were routinely conflated with prostitution in the eyes of medieval moralists. Karras quotes one angry writer for the Corporation of London Records Office who rails against female travelling in his condemnation of prostitution: “the horrible and stinking sin of lechery,... by means of the strumpets, misguided and idle women daily vagrant and walking about by the streets and lanes of this city of London and suburbs of the same, and also repairing to taverns ... provoking many other people unto the said sin of lechery” (16).

This legal and sociological backdrop gives us some insight into the ways in which female travel has been conflated with rogue sexuality. In fact, the prostitute who worked on the street was of low status even among her own kind; most medieval sex workers stayed in brothels or took men home with them.<sup>9</sup>

While historical records condemn the sexuality of walking women as unchaste or illegal, the literature demonstrates that walking women become erotic objects—sexualized for the gratification of the male reader/watcher—even when the texts retain their condemnation of this female behaviour. Late medieval carols that feature the stock character of the ‘abandoned maiden’ tell of the ruin of a maid’s sexual reputation, oftentimes when she walks alone to a well.<sup>10</sup> Although written in the first person, these lyrics give de-

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Hanawalt, *‘Of Good and Ill Repute’: Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 76.

<sup>8</sup> *Common Women* 70.

<sup>9</sup> Karras, *Common Women* 70–74.

<sup>10</sup> John F. Plummer, “The Woman’s Song in Middle English and its European Backgrounds,” *Vox Feminae: Studies in Medieval Woman’s Song*, ed. John F. Plummer, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 15 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1981).

scriptions of the sexual act in such a way as to display the female body for male gratification. While walking, the maiden meets a man (often a cleric) and they have intercourse. The issue of consent is often unclear in these texts—it could be rape or seduction—but to medieval eyes, the result is the same. Because of her unlicensed roaming, the maiden's sexual integrity is compromised.

Perhaps the most famous example of a female traveller in medieval English literature is Alison, the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. She is the only woman travelling alone on the pilgrimage (the Prioress and the Second Nun are travelling with an entourage of priests) and it is clear that Alison's many and far-ranging pilgrimages are meant to parallel her many marriages and her wide-ranging sexual tastes.<sup>11</sup> The depiction of Alison's roaming sexuality is not purely negative, however, in the sense that she is not penalized for her public status, as are the maidens of popular lyrics. The Wife's travelling is a signal of her virility, and she flaunts it proudly, along with her other sexual attributes (the birthmarks, the gap between her teeth, her *bele chose*).<sup>12</sup> Chaucer's motivations for presenting the Wife's travelling sexuality in this way are contentious, but the point remains that there is some implication that Alison's travelling is integral to her erotic life, and therefore the text indicates a cultural perception (or, perhaps, an anxiety) that women who move outside of the domestic context are more likely to be sexually gratified.

#### *Do I Know You? Travel as a Pretext for Female Pleasure*

Chaucer hints at the erotic potential for women in escaping the domestic context. Moving away from the medieval backgrounds and into later erotic texts, we see other male authors who realize the necessity of travel for the sexual fulfilment of their female characters. The authors of the two keystone erotic novels in the English tradition—*Fanny Hill* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—employ the strategy of displacement in order to have their female protagonists both sexualized and sexually gratified.

John Cleland's *Fanny Hill* has been read as a girl's quest for middle-class wealth and respectability (and, in reverse, as a satire

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<sup>11</sup> Hanawalt, 'Of Good and Ill Repute' 81.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Prologue," *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson et al., 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton, 1987) 105–16.



of middle-class commodified sexual values), and for the most part, the book reflects the domestic impetus, taking place in a few homey brothels. Fanny's journey starts out on a literal level, however, when she moves from her Lancaster county village to London. A recent orphan, she has been divested of the parent/chaperone who defined and protected her at home, and the first scenes of the narrative take place in the carriage as she travels towards London and her erotic fate. The moment Fanny steps into the carriage she is a sexual target; the Wagoner looks "liquorish" (lecherously) upon her, as do the other passengers (42). Fanny is in the company of another travelling woman, who functions only partially as a chaperone—she's protective of Fanny in the carriage, but abandons her the moment they get to London. Alone and in a strange space, like the medieval maiden, Fanny is sexually vulnerable. She is recruited by the madam of her first brothel as she struggles to look for "a place" (employment), and the wheels of Fanny's sexual exploitation/gratification are set in motion.

In a similar way, D.H. Lawrence's *Connie* (*Lady Chatterley*) finds erotic fulfilment only after she leaves home; that is, after she escapes the confines of her marriage/manor house in exchange for Mellors and his forest cottage. The journey may be geographically short—technically, she remains on her own property—but the metaphoric distance between her sexuality in Wragby Hall and her sexuality in the cottage is immense. Lawrence prefigures this in the description of Connie's first sexual encounter as a teenager, which takes place in Germany. Back in England, her husband, her title, and her sprawling, oppressive mansion, Wragby—the "wretched place"—shackle Lady Chatterley sexually.<sup>13</sup> It's no accident that one of the primary solutions to her emotional and sexual malaise, suggested by her father and friends, is travel: "There's nothing organically wrong, but it won't do! It won't do! Tell Sir Clifford he's got to bring you to town, or take you abroad, and amuse you!" (81). Her first, small voyage is to the limits of her own grounds, where she discovers Mellors, her own gamekeeper. In his cottage, Lady Chatterley can shed her title and her domestic identity to become Connie again. Connie is the self without legal or social attachments—it is her erotic core.

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<sup>13</sup> *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986) 80.

Both Cleland and Lawrence construct women's travel in their erotic narratives as necessary to female pleasure, but only to a limited extent. Neither writer is really interested in releasing women so completely as for them to be out of the reach of male sexual needs; indeed, both Fanny and Connie end up re-establishing themselves as domestic sexual objects, as they both settle down with new men and new families. In the work of women writers, we see a willingness to send female characters farther afield in the quest for sexual gratification—and they don't always come home either.

*I'm Coming: Identity and Travel in Women's Erotica*

Aphra Behn is our first example of a female author who uses travel as a pretext for eroticism. Behn's vision of erotic travel is embedded in the very premise of the story of *Oroonoko*; it is because the narrator is travelling (without her father/chaperone, who has died on the voyage to the West Indies) that she meets the very sexy slave Oroonoko.<sup>14</sup> Oroonoko is obviously an erotic object, as is his beautiful wife Imoinda, who is frequently envisioned by Behn half-naked and sexually objectified. Behn parallels geographic travel with erotic engagement in *Oroonoko*, but the novella, although erotic in passages, is not erotica per se. Women writers of full-blown erotica do not hesitate, however, to employ the advantageous elements of female travel in constructing literary visions of female pleasure.

Anais Nin is the first example in the English tradition of a woman writer of erotica who repeatedly presents the sexual potential for women in travel. Specifying particular locations is often the opening gesture of her erotic texts: "In Peru it is the custom . . .," "One morning I was called to a studio in Greenwich Village . . .," "I was spending the summer in Mallorca . . ." Travellers, both male and female, are eroticized by Nin.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, simply by virtue of the fact that they travel, they are sexy. The first erotic hero we meet in *Delta of Venus* is the "Hungarian Adventurer," whose "astonishing beauty, infallible charm, grace . . . culture, knowledge of many tongues," and "aristocratic manners" are aligned with his "genius for intrigue . . . for moving smoothly in and out of countries" (1). As we find out later in the story, the Baron (as he is

<sup>14</sup> *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> *Delta of Venus* (1969; New York: Pocket, 1990).

called) is very much a lover-conquistador, penetrating women's bodies as he penetrates foreign lands.

There is no question that Nin embraces the principle of identity displacement in travel; the travelling woman becomes only herself—that is, nobody—and this frees her to fulfil her deepest, darkest sexual desires. In Nin's short story "Elena," the protagonist searches for her mystery lover on a railway platform, but once on the train she turns to her book, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As she moves through the pages, and the train moves through the countryside, Elena voyages through her own psyche, releasing the "submerged woman" inside her who responds to Lady Chatterley's journey: "A new woman emerged from the train at Caux."<sup>16</sup> From here Nin takes Elena on an eighty-page voyage of a highly eroticized France, where we delve into the sexual psyches of not just Elena but several of her lovers. The narrative itself travels from character to character, from body to body, in its quest to satisfy Elena's (and the reader's) erotic hunger. Donne-like, Elena must move beyond the boundaries of her own identity in order to find ecstasy: she loses herself in her lovers, and we lose her as the erotic focus of the story.

The premise of displacement, of the initial travel away from one's familiar surroundings to a context in which one is unknown, has been picked up by many writers since Nin, especially by the authors of BDSM texts like Pat Califa and Anne Rice. BDSM texts generally make good use of travel motifs because these motifs intersect well with the BDSM project of shedding the socialized, repressed self that interferes with one's access to pleasure, and to an understanding of a true, pure self. Califa's BDSM classic *Macho Sluts* uses the transitory spaces of bars, dungeons, and the apartments of pick-ups as settings, which represent the opposite of any kind of normal domestic space for the women seeking to lose themselves in their SM role-playing.<sup>17</sup> Rice employs the travel motif more extensively in her *Sleeping Beauty* series. *Sleeping Beauty* is, of course, in a state of extreme immobility in her slumber, but once she receives the kiss from her Prince, the three-volume series takes her on a series of adventures in new places.<sup>18</sup> The second and third

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<sup>16</sup> *Delta of Venus* 98.

<sup>17</sup> *Macho Sluts* (Boston: Alyson, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Anne Rice (A.N. Roquelaure), *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty* (1983; New York: Plume, 1999).

volumes begin with her actually in transit—on a cart and on a ship, respectively.<sup>19</sup>

Even within more mainstream erotic texts, the initial movement out of the domestic space is a standard requirement for female sexual pleasure. Mitzi Szereto's two collections of *Erotic Travel Tales* are premised on this construction.<sup>20</sup> The editor's own contribution to the first volume, a short story entitled "Moonburn," actually references the original medieval understanding of the woman on the street as an undomesticated sexual threat to the civil order. The protagonist is an anonymous walker of London's Soho district who engages in random back-alley encounters, often with the pillars of the economic community—"up-and-coming executives and their high-powered bosses."<sup>21</sup> This streetwalker fulfils every fear of the medieval city fathers and then some, as she does not actually require payment for sex, thereby undermining even the capitalist enterprise of prostitution. This roaming sexual vampire is without any kind of domestic context, and therefore without any real identity at all; "She is neither young nor old. It would be difficult to say whether she can be defined as beautiful, since nobody bothers to focus on her face" (39). Her anonymity is the basis of her sexual pleasure, and it is directly antipathetic to the domestic space: "She never goes home with anyone. There is never any reason to" (41).

### *Secret Places: Geographies of Female Pleasure*

If home is not the place of sexual fulfilment for women, where must they go? Where is the territory of their pleasure? The Wife of Bath's pilgrimage may be to the Canterbury shrine, but her ideal sexual Mecca is located in another tradition altogether: the archaic, Celtic faerie-world. Alison's tale laments the passing of the days when women who wandered were in danger of being set upon by faerie-folk—infamous sexual predators of both men and women in the Middle Ages, who would spirit one off to their fairy otherworld of sensual delights.<sup>22</sup> Now, complains Alison, "wommen may go

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<sup>19</sup> *Beauty's Punishment* (1984; New York: Plume, 1999) and *Beauty's Release* (New York: Plume, 1985).

<sup>20</sup> Mitzi Szereto, ed., *Erotic Travel Tales* (San Francisco: Cleis, 2001) and *Erotic Travel Tales 2* (San Francisco: Cleis, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> *Erotic Travel Tales* 41.

<sup>22</sup> Maureen Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery* (London: Hodder, 1972).

saufly up and down," with no greater threat than the occasional friar who (scorns the wife, perhaps in an indirect prod at the clerics in the abandoned maiden tradition) "ne wol doon hem but dishonour" (117). That is, the wandering woman may be sexually compromised by a human interloper, but she won't be sexually gratified. Alison's erotic destination is ultimately a fantasy world, one that she never gets to within the context of Chaucer's text. Yet the concept of the otherworld as the erotic destination for women is an apt metaphor in the sense that it conflates a geographic journey outward with a psycho-sexual journey inward.

The fantasy world of female erotic fulfilment can be virtually anywhere—rural or urban; European, American, or 'Oriental'; earth-bound or some sexual Avalon of pure fantasy. Cleland saw the urban anonymity of London as Fanny's erotic space, while Lawrence countered that vision with his investment in a nostalgic English greenworld. Lawrence's handling of the issue of finding an ideal location for erotic pleasure is interesting, because he actually takes the reader through several possible scenarios along with his heroine, as she searches for her sexual place in the world. Connie must leave Wragby in order to find her sexual self. But Lawrence doesn't see continental travel in urban settings like Paris or Venice, which are often associated with sexual adventure, as the answer. In his eyes the mechanization and commodification of the natural world has contaminated Europe as well as England. The British tourist in search of "enjoyment," especially, is reviled by Lawrence, and as a result, Connie cannot find sexual fulfilment in her European tour. Paris, with its "worn-out sensuality" was only one of "the saddest towns," ground into joyless, "now-mechanical sensuality, weary of the tension of money, money, money" (265–66). The debased remnants of the tradition of sexual tourism are still present in Venice, with Connie's gondolier; "He was perfectly ready to prostitute himself to them ... [they] would give him a handsome present, and it would come in very handy, as he was just going to be married" (271).

For Lawrence, travel is not about the amount of distance covered, or the foreignness of the destination, but the extent to which it can bring Connie to a primeval, erotic self, unconstrained by upper-class intellectual and social snobberies. Therefore, the journey Connie takes is to an older, less-mechanized version of home; it is 'Merrie England,' a greenworld which functions simi-

larly to the Wife of Bath's faerie otherworld of the past. Like Chaucer, Lawrence considers time to be a geographic dimension: the agrarian England he yearns for is as anachronistic as Alison's Celtic faerieland. This kind of nostalgia gets built into the erotic vision, and it is picked up by later authors like Nin, Anne Rice and Peggy Munson (whom I will discuss later), who regard the past as an erotic destination.

Lawrence's metaphors of travel become conflated with the female body; the journey is inward to the hidden cottage in the woods, the secret place, echoed in Connie's finding ecstasy in a "secret place" of her own. The ultimate erotic act in the novel, which is anal sex, is described as "burning out the shames, the oldest, deepest shames, in the most secret places" (257). Connie's discovery of her real sexuality involves one of the most taboo sex acts in her cultural world, yet it leads her to "the real bed-rock of her nature," where she finds her "sensual self, naked and unshamed" (258). From the perspective of reading for travel motifs in erotica, it is interesting to note that sodomy is xenophobically called the "Italian way" by Clifford Chatterley (278–79). Anal intercourse takes the same metaphoric position in the novel as Mellor's Edenic cottage, or the realm of Scotland, to which Connie retreats to wait for her divorce from Clifford. These are the secret places where a person is divested of shame, where a secret—but (in Donne's sense) purer and more honest—sexual identity is constructed.

Lawrence's conflation of geography and the female body is, of course, a stereotype of sexual travelling, what Pamela Cheek calls "woman-as-land."<sup>23</sup> We see examples of this motif in Donne's "Elegy XIX" ("O my America, my new found land")<sup>24</sup> and in characters like Nin's Baron. Lawrence's use of the woman-as-land convention is somewhat different, however, because Connie's body becomes an erotic destination for *herself*, as much as for her male lover. Despite the problem of Lawrence's sexual politics (Connie finds pleasure in submission, a passivity that echoes the masculinist lover-conquistador tradition), his attempt to refocus the story on female pleasure, not just male pleasure, is a start to the kind of revisioning of erotic strategies that women authors continue in

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<sup>23</sup> *Sexual Antipodes: Enlightenment Globalization and the Placing of Sex* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003) 83.

<sup>24</sup> *Poems*, ed. Smith 125.

contemporary erotica. In Mary Maxwell's "I Want," from the anthology *Aqua Erotica*, we see both an homage to and a feminist revision of the woman-as-land convention: "The distant hills are reddish-brown, worn smooth as the curves of a woman's body."<sup>25</sup> Maxwell's story of a road-trip tryst on a "desert road, straight and level, as relentless as desire," becomes the scene for a magical sex world in a mirage. Two women make love in a small puddle they pour onto the road: "I want to fuck you on the desert road to nowhere, by a pool of water that never was" (14). The magic mirage that stays true, like the larger landscape, becomes the woman's body: "You are warm and soft and wet and the desert smells of you, musky and strong .... It's the heat that does it—hot road beneath you; hot sky above" (13). In Maxwell's story a motif that began as a male fantasy of penetration becomes a female fantasy of immersion; the women's bodies become immersed in the land (or vice versa), just as the bodies of the two lovers become immersed in each other.

In some senses, any construction of a foreign territory as an erotic space tends to appropriate and romanticize the land and its inhabitants, making them 'exotic.' But there is also a substantial tradition of Orientalism in the narrower sense in English erotica. Others have examined this topic more thoroughly than I can do here, but it is necessary to raise the idea here, if only to consider the ways in which the texts I've been discussing participate in the Orientalist erotic tradition. This tradition has been discussed most extensively by Irvin C. Schick, who opens his exhaustive study of Orientalist erotica with the following comments:

If harems and polygyny had not existed in parts of Asia and Africa, Europeans would have had to invent them. But exist they did, and western attitudes towards Turkey, and Islam generally, have, for several centuries, been shaped by a combination of moral outrage and irrepressible concupiscence focused on the trope of "oriental sexuality."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Aqua Erotica*, ed. Mary Anne Mohanraj (New York: Three Rivers, 2000) 11.

<sup>26</sup> *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse* (London: Verso, 1999) 1.

Orientalist erotica, written from masculine perspectives and masculine traditions of travel, eroticize foreign countries and women as that which must be 'penetrated.' The women of these exotic lands are static—oftentimes envisioned as contained in a harem, where they wait to offer the European traveller untold sexual delights. Female pleasure is depicted only as the result of the women giving men pleasure. In the mythology of the harem his orgasm is her pleasure. Male travel is constructed as sexual in this tradition, but women are merely the travelled *to*: static, placid and facelessly conflated with the identity of their country.

Female authors engage the tradition of Orientalist erotica in different ways. Behn invests in the tradition insofar as she imagines Oroonoko's African homeland in terms that resemble a western stereotype of a medieval Arabic court. Although her portrayal of Imoinda is certainly more sympathetic than the traditional portrayal of the faceless harem-woman, critics have noted she still exploits Imoinda's sexual representation from a position of cultural and sexual dominance.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Nin doesn't hesitate to employ Orientalist conventions eroticizing Africans, although she manages a gender inversion of sorts in "The Basque and Bijou," where the nameless male character simply called "the African" performs a "dance from my own country ... for the women on feast days" for the pleasure of European women.<sup>28</sup>

In the final instalment of her *Sleeping Beauty* series, Anne Rice has her heroine travel to the "Sultan's Palace," resulting in an SM fantasy of an Arabian otherworld where the European Beauty joins the ranks of the Sultan's sex slaves—a fate shared by her male companion slaves. In classic BDSM tradition, Beauty and the other slaves find pleasure in giving pleasure to others—this fits nicely with the Orientalist vision of the harem. Although each of these authors (Rice, Nin, and Behn) is willing to appropriate the idea of the exotic in the name of female pleasure, each still retains many of the constructions of Orientalism which theorists feel prevent any real subjectivity for the original sexual object of Orientalism, the eastern woman. Behn switches the European adventurer from

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<sup>27</sup> Margaret W. Ferguson, "Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," *Women, "Race," and Writing In the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London: Routledge, 1994) 209–24.

<sup>28</sup> *Delta of Venus* 206.



male to female, retaining the objectified dark-skinned woman. Nin makes the exotic 'other' male instead of female (and he has travelled to Europe, instead of being travelled to) but he is as empty of any identity, outside of his race and sexuality, as is the harem-girl. Rice exoticizes the race of "the Sultan" and his court, but makes them active, shifting the required sexual passivity to the European slaves. All of these inversions toy with the original structures of Orientalist erotica, but don't truly challenge them.

One writer who has risen to the challenge of trying to represent female pleasure in the tradition of the exotic is Wendy Law-Yone, whose short story "Drought" is constructed out of the "the old tropical stereotypes," as she writes in the author's note that accompanies the text; "But why fight them?" she goes on to ask, "if instead you can stand them on their head? 'Drought' is my version of what happens when a restless native tends a wounded knight."<sup>29</sup> In this story, a young girl finds a downed American pilot in a coma. As she nurses him, he becomes an erotic fixation for her. She uses his inanimate body (he never regains consciousness in the story) for her own sexual gratification. Law-Yone's story gives an erotic identity to the Asian woman who is usually the exotic object, and strips the European male of sexual agency or identity. Technically, the American pilot is still the traveller, while the girl is trapped on an island. But in entering the foreign land as a limp body, the man loses his conventional position of sexual dominance—he does not 'penetrate' either the country or the girl. Instead, the foreign woman is the active one, and it is she who appropriates his sexuality. Law-Yone's strategy is more effective than simple inversions of the sort attempted by writers like Behn, Nin and Rice. By retaining the original geographies of the Orientalist tradition (the European male travels to the foreign female), she makes the point that women of the East have always possessed their own sexual identities; they have just never been given a voice in the erotic literary tradition.

*Fast Women: Eroticizing Technologies of Travel*

The eroticizing of geography may be a convention as old as medieval faerie lore, but modern technology has contributed a new motif to erotic travel writing: the idea that 'getting there is half the

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<sup>29</sup> *Slow Hand: Women Writing Erotica*, ed. Michelle Slung (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993) 40.

fun,' in that the very vehicles we travel in have erotic potential. In the twentieth century, cars and trains in particular have given rise to sexual mythologies, often involving specific constructions of female pleasure. Vehicles serve three erotic functions: they are metaphors of the body, they are erotic spaces in themselves, and they are the means by which we are transported to other erotic spaces.

As metaphors of the body, technologies can be masculine or feminine. In *Fanny Hill* penises are 'engines' of phallic power in the employment of female 'transports': the bigger, faster, more powerful the engine, the greater the woman's pleasure. It has become something of a cultural commonplace, however, to construct the woman-as-machine motif. Often seen in automotive advertising, this motif involves the presentation of the female body as a vehicle to be driven for male pleasure. Prince's song "Little Red Corvette" neatly encapsulates the metaphor: "Baby, you're much too fast." The conventional conflation of the car with the woman's body is reworked in Nalin Kant's story "The Red Convertible," to place female pleasure on an equal ground with male pleasure. Driving the car is equated with making love: "Take it easy, don't spoil her mood again with rash driving. But not too slow either, keep the motor revved up."<sup>30</sup>

Reversing the usual woman-as-car motif altogether, Cheryl Cline's "Pickup" conflates the machine and the male body (signalled in the title pun itself). The truck's representation of raw sexual power involves a specific race and class designation that is also eroticized—the working class rebel, set up in opposition to middle-class sexual propriety. The heroine of Cline's story finds her driver and they have sex in the back—in the "bed"—of the pickup:

Vickie closed her eyes and was floating above them; she could see them like that, she naked and spread in the back end of an old truck, Phil in his jeans and boots and leather ... her pleasure took a sharp turn and she was going 'round the bend at ninety miles an hour, and then she was all but climbing out of the truck bed. Phil was getting a bumpy

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<sup>30</sup> *Erotic Travel Tales*, ed. Szereto 234.

ride ... she was going down that hill at ninety miles an hour, and Phil had the throttle all the way out.<sup>31</sup>

Another travel technology with a substantial erotic history is the train, especially in light of the stereotype of phallic symbolism that it has come to represent. In fact, even before Freud, train travel was eroticized. Fanny Kemble, the first woman to ride a train in Britain (she was hired to write a feature on it by a newspaper), evoked the sexual analogy in the opening sentence of her article: "A common sheet of paper is enough for love, but foolscap extra can alone contain a railroad and my ecstasies."<sup>32</sup> The engine is bigger than "love"—and it requires a bigger piece of paper! In Kemble's account of her "ride," she seems actually orgasmic. Once the train reaches its top speed of thirty-five miles per hour, Kemble writes, "You could not conceive of what that sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible too .... when I closed my eyes this sensation of flying was quite delightful, and strange beyond description" (1051).

But as the technology of travel evolves, so does its erotic symbolism. Train travel is now relatively unpopular as a form of transportation, although there are a number of erotic stories involving scenarios on subways and commuter trains. For long-distance travel to exotic lands, the airplane is the standard vehicle. This has given rise to a number of sexual stereotypes in the popular imagination, like the 'mile-high club' and the 'coffee, tea or me' vision of stewardesses. When writers do turn to the cross-country passenger train in contemporary fiction, they are often consciously evoking cultural nostalgia, old-world romance as part of the erotic charge. In "The Long Parallel Tracks," published in *On Our Backs*, author Peggy Munson employs this nostalgia self-consciously, and relates it directly to female pleasure:

It may sound like a romantic artifact from a Russian novel, but in my country the sleeper car is

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<sup>31</sup> *Herotica: A Collection of Women's Erotic Fiction*, ed. Susie Bright (San Francisco: Down There, 1988) 15–16.

<sup>32</sup> "First Ride on a Steam Engine," *Record of a Girlhood* (New York: Holt, 1879) 1050.

just a haven for aviophobes willing to pour their yearly savings into a trip that takes 12 times as long as by airplane ... rumbling past the dizzying faded paint of freight cars, I always relearn the lost art of patience.<sup>33</sup>

Where once it evoked a phallic projectile speeding its European passenger to new and better erotic identities, in contemporary America the train means a deliberate inefficiency: a return to a slower, more patient time. Slowness and patience are cultural virtues that just happen to be sexual virtues as well—especially, Munson seems to imply, for lesbians: “she started slowly biting and kissing my neck. People who take trains know how to linger” (225). Munson makes the eroticism of cultural nostalgia for train travel overt, aligning it with a sort of national childhood of pure sexual energy:

I hoped she was repeating the little engine’s mantra in her head, because I wanted to make her feel good. I wanted to fuck her all the way back to her Americana steam-engine roots. And when she finally wailed for me, it had the pull of nostalgia and the sweet taste of everything familiar. (228)

Munson’s woman on the train has encountered her dream Midwestern butch, who exploits both the physical motion of the train and the gendered language of transportation, for sexual gratification: “Just then the train jerked forward and my face slammed into her cunt .... ‘No cockpit,’ she said, smirking. ‘Just the long parallel tracks’” (228). The airplane is now the (too-fast!) cock, and the labial train tracks provide the time (both in terms of sexual time and in terms of an idyllic cultural past) and the space of female sexual gratification.

For virtually every mode of transportation there is an attendant erotic fantasy: boats (luxury cruises, adrift-at-sea scenarios, even canoes) provide a subcategory all on their own. Much of this writing is contemporary, and there is often a self-conscious tongue-in-

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<sup>33</sup> *On Our Backs: The Best Erotic Fiction*, ed. Lindsay Clune (Los Angeles: Alyson, 2001) 222.

cheek quality to these stories, as authors engage a tradition that borders on amusing stereotype. But writers return repeatedly to the erotic potential of transportation technologies, even if they wink to readers as they do so.

*Come Here Often?*

Despite all the social strictures on female travel—some of which still exist today—travel is frequently set as a prerequisite to female sexual fulfilment in erotic writing. When we remove ourselves from our domestic contexts, we destabilize our very identities—identities that may be restricting us, if social expectations conflict with sexual desires. Travel makes us anonymous, which releases us from the burden of our domestic selves, and which in turn gives us the opportunity to construct more sexually liberated selves. This is true for both men and women, of course, but where men are frequently rewarded for adventuring into other cultural and social contexts, women are frequently punished. The anonymity that a woman acquires by travelling alone is marked as dangerous—both to her and to the broader community. She may be raped, or she may herself become a predator—the streetwalker. But in erotic writing there seems to be a covert acknowledgement, even in texts as early as *The Canterbury Tales*, that female erotic pleasure cannot be found in the domestic ideal of the feminine.

There are old, perhaps almost subconscious, cultural associations between travel—especially women who travel—and female eroticism. This paper has attempted to sketch out how writers of erotic texts engage these old associations in their depictions of female pleasure. All writers, rooted in their own historical, gendered, and cultural contexts, handle the issue differently, and it's difficult (and, I think, ultimately undesirable) to attempt any hard and fast generalizations about how male and female, medieval and modern, or English and North American writers collectively represent the issue. What I find more interesting is the broader pattern of shared ideas between diverse texts: the eroticization of the past as a foreign country, for example, shared by Geoffrey Chaucer, Anne Rice, and Peggy Munson; the conflation of danger and pleasure for woman in travelling alone, prefigured in medieval 'abandoned maiden' lyrics, and picked up four centuries later by Anaïs Nin; the persistent woman-as-land motif reworked by writers like Mary Maxwell; or, as a final example, the eroticization of travel

technology, which may even be extended back to the idea of 'streetwalking,' in a time when walking was the primary mode of urban travel.

If there is any common denominator that will link all of the themes and all of the texts that I have considered in this paper, it's that writing about travel and female pleasure involves a sense of experimentation and 'play.' Perhaps because erotic literature has lived on the margins for so long, and as a contemporary genre is still very raw and unformed, writers engaging these ideas frequently do so tentatively, acknowledging subtle traditions regarding women and travel, without directly articulating the sources of these traditions. I hope that this paper does some work towards connecting the dots between texts.

As female erotic pleasure becomes a common literary project (especially as publishers attempt to construct a market for women's erotica), narratives of travel proliferate to the extent that they have become almost a cliché of the genre. And yet, there is a central irony to this, as representations of female travel in erotica are often sold purely as fantasy material for a largely stationary reading public. So how much can travel—real travel—be said to be an erotic opportunity for women? It is possible that we have constructed two opposing concepts of female sexuality in travel: one restrictive and 'real,' the other a liberating fiction. Perhaps, as for the Wife of Bath, our erotic destinations are fantasies best laid out in stories; perhaps erotica is our Avalon.